



The New America School

Success 2011 Report

Message from Chair

As Chair of the New America School Board of Directors, I am thrilled to share our schools' success stories. Our Colorado schools—Aurora, Lakewood and Denver—continue to establish themselves as strong alternative high schools for English Language Learners. This year, with the support of the NAS nonprofit office, the school principals and teachers have introduced a shared curriculum focused on Sheltered English Instruction and meeting the state requirements for graduation.



Gina Nocera

with Annie Trujillo as returning principal. Our Denver/Mapleton campus has a new principal this year: Michael Epke, the former assistant principal at NAS-Denver. His commitment to NAS as well as his teaching and administrative experience will be a great benefit to the Denver campus.

In 2011 NAS also saw dramatic changes to our structure. The national NAS board of directors formed in the spring and is charged with researching and developing New America Schools in the southwest region. The national NAS board is currently focused on opening a school in Las Cruces, New Mexico, which will complement our NAS campus to the north in Albuquerque. In addition, the national NAS board is researching Las Vegas, Nevada as a possible site for a New America School.

It's an exciting time to be part of the NAS community. I'd like to thank the NAS nonprofit office, school principals, my fellow board members, teachers and staff and our incredible students for their commitment to the NAS mission.

Our Lakewood campus has moved to a new facility on Alameda and Harlan and we are delighted to provide our students with a beautiful, modern school building, which includes an auditorium, cafeteria, library and gym. The school is located in the center of where many of our students live, and I believe, under the leadership of Principal Jon Berninzoni, it will become a focal point of the community.

Our Aurora campus continues to have strong, established leadership

NAS-Lakewood Moves to Improved, Expanded Facility

In order to better meet the needs of its students, New America School-Lakewood will be moving to a new, expanded and 21st century technology-equipped facility this fall. The new site will offer many amenities not available at NAS-Lakewood's previous location, including a library, a multipurpose room with a stage, weight room, cafeteria and gymnasium, and fully equipped science and art rooms.

"I can't tell you how excited I am for our students," says Principal Jon Berninzoni. "NAS serves a diverse population of recent immigrants and at-risk students. Traditional schools do not always seem to provide the level of support needed by these kids. This new site will show students that we value them and, in turn, they will learn to value their education."



The new site will be located at 5806 Alameda near the corner of Alameda and Harlan.

"I am thrilled that we were able to find such a great site for our new Lakewood campus," commented NAS Superintendent Dominic DiFelice. "It is in the heart of the community of students we serve. This newly renovated state-of-the-art facility will provide additional space, enhanced technology and a welcoming learning environment for students and staff."

NAS Board members

- **Gina Nocera** (Board Chair), Executive Director, Jared Polis Foundation
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- **Polly Baca**, former State Senator and community leader
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Mission

The mission of The New America School is to empower new immigrants and English Language Learners with the educational tools and support they need to maximize their potential, succeed and live the American dream.

Lowry Student Overcomes – With a Little Help from her Friends

December 11, 2005 is a day that will live in infamy for 2010 New America School - Lowry graduate Kim Urbina and her family. That day, Kim, 21, was diagnosed with near complete kidney failure. Her kidneys were functioning at only 9%. "It was a huge surprise and I was scared and I didn't really know what to think. I didn't know if I was going to live or die," said Kim.

Doctors told Kim that because her kidneys were no longer working properly, she would either be on dialysis for the rest of her life (a mechanical process that replaces kidney function) or she would need a kidney transplant. Both seemed daunting and far from affordable for Kim and her family. She explained. "We didn't know what we were going to do."

For one year, Medicaid paid for Kim's dialysis, but then the funds ran out. She was told that there was nothing that could be done for her if she did not have

insurance or a lot of money – which she did not.

At a loss, Kim took her story to a former teacher at the New America School – Lowry. The teacher brainstormed with fellow staff members and it was decided they would present the dilemma to NAS co-founder and current United States Congressman Jared Polis, with the hope that he may be aware of – or possess himself - resources that could help Kim. As it turned out, it was the right call.

Polis took on the task of getting Kim healthy. He helped get her set up on a dialysis program and told her that he would make sure that she got the kidney transplant she needed to live a normal life again.

"I was very happy to play a positive role in Kim's life. I hope that she makes the most of the gift of life. Kim's experiences help us realize how fragile life is, and how important things that

we often take for granted are, like our health," said Polis, from Washington, D.C.

While the decision to help Kim was an easy one for Polis, making the transplant happen proved to be more difficult. Apparently, cash-paying surgery candidates are rare and it took a while to find a facility in the United States that would perform the transplant for a patient without insurance. "We were going to go to India for the transplant," explained Kim, "but fortunately we found a place here that would do it."

Finally, after years of dialysis and financial wrangling, Kim received a new kidney through a transplant on November 9, 2010. She said that she is doing great, and she is working and going to school to be a nurse.

Kim is still in touch with Polis and she said that she simply doesn't have words enough to describe what he means to her. "He really is ... something special."

School Updates

If You Feed Them, They Will Eat

After years of hard work, **NAS-Lowry** has procured a Free and Reduced Lunch Program. Though NAS has long been working to provide our Lowry students access to quality, healthy food on campus, the process met with many obstacles. Mainly, it has been difficult to find a company willing to provide sack lunches at the Federal reimbursement rate.



"The lunch program has been a great addition to Lowry. We have been working on providing better food service for the past 5 years, and it was really exciting to see the program come together." says Principal Annie Trujillo. "Our students need the option for a free or reduced healthy lunch and dinner and we are now able to provide that."

New Leadership to Guide NAS-Denver

NAS-Denver has introduced Mike Epke as the school's new principal. Mike served as assistant and then interim principal during 2010-11 and has worked at NAS-Denver since 2009. Scott Hunter has joined the Denver campus as the new assistant principal. Together Mike and Scott, along with a strong staff, are looking forward to continuing the positive momentum that has been building at NAS-Denver over the last few years.

The NAS-Denver leadership will put in place new programming, made possible through funding from the Colorado Department of Education: The five-year Colorado Pathways to Graduation program will allow the school to hire a Success Counselor who will work with all students, but have the greatest impact on the students who need the most support. CGPP funding will also enable NAS-Denver to offer more school supported activities like clubs, field trips, sports, and support groups.

New Mexico Campus Shines

After only two years, the **Albuquerque campus** is exceeding all expectations in growth and achievement. Indeed, the need for a high-quality charter school is such that after one year, NAS-NM has asked the New Mexico Public Education Department, and received,

permission to go beyond the original student count of 350. Three more buildings have been added this summer to accommodate the student population and meet academic needs. Most excitingly, in June the Albuquerque campus celebrated graduation with 32 seniors, ranging in age from 17 to 42-an amazing 92% of the seniors who were enrolled at the beginning of the year!

NAS Applies to Open School in Las Cruces, NM

The New America School has applied to the New Mexico Public Education Commission to open a new charter school in Las Cruces, New Mexico. The NAS application has advanced to the final hearing stage, with a decision to be made in early September. With a positive ruling, **NAS-Las Cruces** will open its doors in August 2012.

The school will fill a great need: New Mexico's foreign-born population has grown by 85% over the past 20 years. Seventy-two percent of the Las Cruces school district's student population is Hispanic.

Moreover, the graduation rate for the district is only 64%. Many of the students who drop out lack the English skills necessary to succeed in mainstream high schools. NAS-Las Cruces will be able to meet the needs of these students.

Graduation: 2011

NAS Students on the Road to Success



More than 2,000 friends and family packed the beautiful The Ellie Caulkins Opera House for the New America School 2011 graduation ceremonies. One hundred and seventy-nine very proud students paraded across the stage to receive their well-earned diplomas. Festivities included speeches by three NAS graduating seniors, Monica Mendoza (Lakewood), Abelino Casillas (Denver), and Mara Gonzalez (Aurora) as well as some sage advice from NAS board chair emeritus, Polly Baca. Ms. Baca inspired students by relating her own upbringing. Despite being a fourth

generation Coloradan, she felt racial discrimination, including segregation, from an early age. Considered by many as a Mexican-American, she was treated differently than English-speakers. In church, she discovered that Mexican-Americans had to sit in a different area from Anglos. Using these experiences as motivation, Ms. Baca eventually fought to become a member of the Colorado House of Representatives, the first Hispanic woman and first minority woman to be elected to the Colorado State Senate, and an inductee to National Hispanic Hall of Fame. Most of the attending NAS graduates have faced similar obstacles, and with their diploma have taken a major step towards following in Ms. Baca's footsteps and overcoming those obstacles.



Five Students Earn NAS Scholarships

Each year, New America School selects up to five exceptional graduating students to receive the Colorado Educational Opportunity Scholarship. The scholarship is awarded to students who have demonstrated academic achievement throughout their time at NAS, a positive contribution to the NAS community, and are committed to attending and completing post-secondary education or training. The Opportunity Scholarship is made possible through the generosity of the **Polis-Schutz Family Foundation**, as well as other NAS benefactors. This year, the Foundation once again contributed \$25,000 to the scholarship fund.

Nestor Noe, *Colorado Educational Opportunity Scholarship Recipient*

"If there were one word I could use to describe Nestor Noe, it would be metamorphosis. Nestor came to the New America School in the fall of 2008 after having dropped out of school in 2006. At the time, he showed no signs that he would be the kind of young man he is today. His attendance, grades and behavior were little more than average. But by the



2009/2010 school year, things began to change. Nestor began to show what he was truly capable of. In Nestor's first year at NAS, his grade point average hovered around a 2.0. By the next year, his GPA skyrocketed to a 3.5... This year, Nestor has a 4.0... But grades and achievement are not the only demonstration of Nestor's transformation... Beyond the classroom, Nestor is one of the most responsible young persons that I have ever met. He is a father and a husband. He is a student and a worker. He seems to balance the numerous roles he place with grace and maturity."

— Matthew Johnson,
NAS-Lowry Counselor

Support for NAS Grows

NAS-Denver and NAS-Lowry will receive approximately \$500,000 over the next five years from the Colorado Department of Education's **Colorado Pathways to Graduation Program** to establish dropout prevention and student re-engagement initiatives.

This fall, supported by a \$25,000 grant from the **Temple Hoyne Buell Foundation**, NAS implemented a research-based, proven teen pregnancy prevention program, *¡Cuidate!*, at our Lakewood campus.

In addition to its contribution to support student scholarships, **The Polis-Schutz Family Foundation** donated \$25,000 in general operating support to NAS. The **Anschutz Family Foundation** has also granted NAS \$5,000 in general operating support.

To honor Stephen and Susan Polis-Schutz, author **Marjorie Hansen Shaevitz** has donated 85 copies of her book *adMISSION POSSIBLE: Getting Into the College of Your Choice* to NAS. This guide will supplement the course curriculum of our senior transition courses.

One hundred percent of the **New America School Board of Directors** contributed to NAS in fiscal year 2010-2011. NAS takes great pride in unequivocal financial support of our board, as these contributions demonstrate that the people closest to NAS are deeply committed to the work we do and fully believe in the school's capacity to forever change the lives our students.

New America School Student Voices

Michael Buenfil Villamil, NAS Lakewood, was the high school winner of The Colorado League of Charter School's 3rd Annual Colorado Charter Schools Essay Contest. Below are excerpts of Michael's winning essay.



This year will be my first completed year of high school, after five years and five different high schools. The New America School took me in and gave me a chance when no one else would or could. Because of my learning experience at NAS, I am

graduating from high school and starting college in the summer.

I was born in Cancun, Mexico. I grew up with no father and a mother who worked three jobs and was hardly around. My three brothers and I moved thirteen times in one year and lived in a car for two months. By the time I was fourteen, I was considered a drug addict, went to rehab twice, and hated my life so much I didn't care what happened to me. At school, there were too many kids like me for the teachers to care and I drifted from class to class with little interest. As the drama increased at home and my grades took a free fall at school, I became less and less connected with school life. I would just give up and stop going until we moved again and I started at another high school. This was a pattern that I repeated over and over. Everything changed when I found out I was going to be a father and enrolled at a charter school.

I was seventeen years old when my girlfriend told me we were having a baby. I knew I had to change. When we went for the five months ultra sound we found out she had an extra tissue in her lungs and her left bottom chamber of her heart wouldn't function without surgery. She would have to have a tube in her heart and remove the extra tissue; there was a 50/50 chance that she might not make it. I was terrified that she was going to die. I moved back in with my mom, said good bye to drugs, and enrolled at The New America School. Without my daughter in my life, I would probably be dead. She is also the main reason I looked for a school that would work for me.

I love The New America School because it has less students and the teachers can focus on each individual student. I hated all the drama of a public school, where the teachers did not really know me. At New America, I feel valued. The teachers here see in me what no one else did before – a better person trying to do his best...

Mara Gonzalez, NAS Lowry, was chosen by her peers to present the closing student speech at the NAS 2011 graduation ceremonies. Below are excerpts from her presentation.

I think my story is very similar to the stories of many of us sitting here on the stage of this gorgeous auditorium tonight. In January 2001, I left my home in Chihuahua

and came with my family to Colorado. I started to learn English and loved it here, but there were many financial challenges and after 9/11 my mother took her children back to Mexico. I promised myself I would return. Seven years later in January 2008, I left Chihuahua once again and came back to Colorado to stay with extended family. I saw the New America School commercial on TV and I visited one evening. Even though I had a diploma from Mexico, New America School encouraged me to earn a second diploma, while learning English. Since the first night of school I saw the teachers' devotion and dedication when teaching ESL to newcomers. I loved the supportive environment, the diversity, and the flexibility of the schedule.

I worked hard to learn English, to communicate with others and strived to be myself in a second language. My teachers were always challenging me to improve my vocabulary, and to speak up. Now I am often told that my English is a little too loud! In the beginning, I was very afraid that other students would make fun of me because of my accent. But as soon as I started trying, I realized that I was not alone. Teachers and students helped me to build my confidence, and I learned to laugh at my silly mistakes.



Three years went by very fast in some ways and very slow in others! But tonight I wish time would stop, and this moment that we all worked so hard for, would last longer than this ceremony. I believe we can make it last. I believe we can take these feelings of success and pride with us, for the rest of our lives...

Many of us have gone through difficult times along the way. We have learned each other's stories as we sat in class together. We have learned about places all over the world. Some of us speak five languages, some of us have lived in refugee camps, and some of us haven't seen our families in many years... Some of us have lost family and friends because of war. The causes of the fighting may be different – politics, gangs, drugs, poverty, racism, and all forms of prejudice – but the end is always the same. Some of us never got to be children, because we had to grow up very quickly to help our parents. Now, many of us have children of our own, and we are trying to grow up quickly so that we can give our children a real childhood. Some of us left school, several times, and came back. This is where we finally found a home...

I am one of the lucky ones who got the opportunity to go to college because of the New America School. I took classes at the Community College of Aurora and met more people who were also eager to study and make their lives better. This very morning I registered at a four-year college. I will be attending The Women's College at the University of Denver to continue my education...

There are many students here tonight who also graduated from Pickens Technical College, and developed their skills in many different fields. We are all students who have been able to further our education because of the New America School. We are all very thankful. WE ARE NEW AMERICA SCHOOL.

FUNDING CONTRIBUTIONS

SUPPORT NAS

Your support will enable the New America School to continue to provide high quality education to English Language Learners and non-traditional students. If you would like to visit our school or hear more about our programs and how your generosity can make a huge difference in the lives of NAS students, contact David Rein, drein@newamericaschool.org, 303.894.3160.